

FULFILLING ITS PROMISE

Urban Arts Space drawing variety of imaginative events

By Anna Sudar

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

On the outside, the Urban Arts Space changes little from day to day.

Inside, though, the place is constantly evolving.

The first-floor occupant of the historic Lazarus building is nothing if not versatile: Wall panels hang from a ceiling track system so they can be moved to create new spaces.

The lack of spatial restrictions makes the Ohio State University-owned venue — a 10,000-square-foot expanse Downtown on W. Town Street — well-suited for the range of free programs presented among art displays.

“One of the earliest concepts of this place was that people could explore innovative ideas,” deputy director Kelly Stevelt Kaser said. “To allow that to happen, we need to be as open as possible.

“If you limit yourself, you stifle the creativity.”

Currently on display is the exhibit “BIGG: Breakthrough Ideas in Global Glass,” presented by OSU and Hawk Galleries. The showcase of colorful works by 43 international glass artists — which runs through Oct. 10 — is one of many programs, events and exhibits presented since the space opened in February 2008.

Among others: a quilting exhibit, movie screenings, a clogging demonstration, brown-bag discussions, musical-theater previews, sketch-comedy performances and experimental music concerts. All public programs are free.

Such variety is exactly what faculty members of the OSU College of Arts and Humanities had in mind when they came up with the idea. A goal is to highlight student work and unite artists within the community.

Many programs are planned by student groups or faculty members from a variety of departments. Some professors use the space for classes or labs.

Urban Arts Space has also partnered on exhibits or events with area artists and organizations, including the Franklin Park Conservatory, the Columbus College of Art & Design and the Ohio Art League.

The league presented its 98th annual Spring Juried Art Exhibition there in January and has held workshops and art critiques in the space.

“Bringing together patrons, enthusiasts and artists to share ideas — it’s inspiring,” said Haley Boehning, league president.

Urban Arts Space Director Valarie Williams said audiences have been a mix of students and nonstudents.

Karen Moore, who works in OSU’s foreign-language center, played a community board game of Apples to Apples there recently. She brought along 13-year old Khatashijah Caruthers, whom she mentors through the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

“I think it’s great that they have so many different events,” said Moore, 33. The same evening, a group of art students from Otterbein College explored the glass exhibit. Victoria Losinski, a New Albany teacher and class member, said the space is more “open than a museum,” making it “a great place to bring kids for a field trip.”

To maintain its diverse calendar, Williams and her staff invite program and exhibit ideas, with more than 140 proposals received so far.

“Creative is the key word,” said Jasmine Hamilton, an OSU junior who works as the program student assistant. “If we have the square footage, we’ll try to accommodate you.”

A 15-member committee reviews the proposals for exhibits and extended programs.

“I often consider how (the project) will speak to or impact the average person on High Street walking to work or waiting for a bus — and if it’s presented in a format that’s understandable to them, rather than an academic exhibit,” said committee member Jim Arter, associate artist with the Greater Columbus Arts Council.

Through the privately funded Idea Lab, OSU students can submit proposals and receive funding for their projects. Among recently funded projects: a student-run farm stand on Tuesday and a musicians’ workshop today.

The 15 Urban Arts Space staff members — all OSU students or interns — also contribute programs.

Student media assistant Chris Burton, a recent graduate, plans to organize a teacher workshop about hip-hop art. Working there, Burton said, “has broadened my experience of what an art space and a performance space is.”

Urban Arts Space will use a \$10,000 Greater Columbus Arts Council award for “innovation and risk” to add student-intern positions and continue its devotion to diversity.

Winning such an award means the space is on the right track, Williams said.

“It’s been a wonderful first year,” she said. “Seeing that type of response shows there was a need for (a space) like this.”

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URBAN ARTS SPACE

NOVEMBER: “Cabaret Urbain,” an evening of arias, opera scenes, musical theater and cabaret presented by Ohio State opera and musical-theater students



BROOKE LAVALLEY DISPATCH

JULY: The comedy troupe Sketch By Number



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bal

bit "BIGG: Breakthrough Ideas in Global Glass," including Quincy Neri's Hydrogen Collapse





FRED SQUILLANTE DISPATCH

JULY: A community game of Apples to Apples at the OSU Urban Arts Space, which is designed to be open and adaptable to myriad events